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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 000610

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SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/MUSLIM OUTREACH: INTEGRATION EXAM
REQUIRED PRIOR TO IMMIGRATION

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¶1. Summary: Effective March 15, certain nationalities will need to pass a civic integration exam to immigrate to the Netherlands. Initial reactions in local and foreign press have been divided on whether such a policy will result in better integration of immigrants in the country or only further limits on immigration, especially from Muslim countries. End Summary.

NEW IMMIGRATION ENTRANCE EXAM

¶2. The Netherlands' Civic Integration Examination Abroad, which became effective March 15, requires potential immigrants to take a Dutch language and culture test at a Dutch foreign mission abroad before applying for a temporary residence permit. Test takers can purchase an education package for 65 euros, which includes a DVD film on the Netherlands, a booklet with images from the film, a CD with questions from the "Knowledge of Dutch Society" section of the test, and three mock Dutch language tests. Sitting for the exam costs approximately 350 euros.

¶3. The two-hour film "To the Netherlands" is intended to provide a realistic picture of life in the Netherlands, including information on Dutch politics, work, education and healthcare. It also shows aspects of liberal Dutch culture, such as two gay men kissing in a bar and a topless woman on the beach. An edited version with no homosexual or nudity scenes is available for distribution in countries where such images are prohibited (e.g., Iran). The film features run-down neighborhoods where poorer immigrants may live and warns of traffic jams, integration problems, unemployment, and other issues that new immigrants may face in the Netherlands.

EXEMPTED GROUPS

¶4. The following persons are exempted from taking the test:

- Persons of EU, U.S., Australian, Canadian, Icelandic, Liechtenstein, Monaco, New Zealand, Norwegian, Polish, Swiss, or Vatican nationality;
- Persons of Surinamese nationality who have written proof of completion of primary education in the Dutch language;
- Persons coming to the Netherlands for a temporary reason, such as study, au pair work, an exchange, or medical treatment;
- Persons (and family members) coming to the Netherlands with a work permit, the self-employed, and knowledge migrants;
- Family members of a person with an asylum-seeker's

residence permit; and
-- Skilled workers making more than \$54,000 per year.

PROMOTING INTEGRATION

¶ 15. The new entrance exam is part of a government effort to promote integration of immigrants and is based on the belief that immigrants with a basic knowledge of Dutch society and the Dutch language will have a better chance of integrating. The exam is also intended to force potential immigrants to consider carefully whether they would fit into one of Europe's more permissive societies and to discourage immigration of those with little education. Most first generation Turkish and Moroccan immigrants, the two largest immigrant groups in the Netherlands, are not well educated and often speak little Dutch. Second generation immigrants are doing far better, but up to 80 percent of this group marry partners from their ancestral countries, who also largely lack secondary educations and Dutch language skills.

¶ 16. To counter this trend and to promote integration of newcomers, the government has implemented a range of measures, including a requirement that anyone marrying a partner from a non-exempt country must show that they earn at least 120 percent of the legal minimum wage (about 1,270 euros/month) and can assume financial responsibility for the immigrating partner. Previously, immigrating partners only needed to enroll in unpaid integration and Dutch language courses upon arrival in the Netherlands. Now they must complete the entrance exam in their home country as well as the integration and language courses in the Netherlands. Private organizations have already started offering test preparation courses in Turkey and Morocco.

AN INFORMED IMMIGRANT . . .

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¶ 17. An editorial in the leading NRC Handelsblad (liberal evening daily) observed that immigrating partners with a basic knowledge of Dutch society will be better prepared to handle problems and lead an independent life without being at the mercy of their future partners. Dutch parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali was quoted by foreign press as saying, "the film is meant for people not yet in Holland to take note that this is normal here and not to be shocked and awed by it once they arrive." Mohammed Sini, chairman of the Islam and Citizenship Group and an Embassy contact, also defended the film, saying that homosexuality is "a reality." He urged all immigrants "to embrace modernity." Other local press reports have focused on the relevancy of the exam questions to effective integration and how educators in Turkey and Morocco are preparing potential immigrants for the exam.

. . . OR A MEANS FOR LIMITING IMMIGRATION

¶ 18. Meanwhile, media in the U.K. and U.S. have quoted a spokesperson from Buitenlandse Partner, a lobbying group for mixed Dutch/immigrant couples, as saying this "is a black day for people intending to bring partners to Holland." In a statement to the Associated Press, Dutch theologian and University of Utrecht professor Karel Steenbrink criticized the DVD film as offensive to some Muslims, adding that it was not a "prudent way of welcoming people to the Netherlands." Famile Arslan, an immigration lawyer and Embassy contact, told the press she has lived in the Netherlands for 30 years and "has never witnessed two men kissing in the park," and questioned why the GONL chose to "confront people with that." She also accused the GONL of "preaching tolerance about civil rights while targeting non-westerners with harsh and discriminatory immigration

curbs." Abdour Menebhi, chairman the Moroccan interest group Emcemo in Amsterdam, told the press that the "film was just another example of how the Netherlands was trying to limit immigration from Muslim countries."

COMMENT: EXAM'S COST STRONG DETERRENT

¶9. The GONL hopes the new entrance exam, which was developed in close consultation with immigrant organizations, will ease immigrants' integration into Dutch civil society and the job market. With the addition of the Civic Integration Examination Abroad, the Netherlands now has some of the strictest immigration policies in Europe. Other West European governments are reportedly watching to see the results of the new test. Only time will tell what effect the testing will have on immigration to the Netherlands, although the cost of the exam alone is likely to be a strong deterrent.

ARNALL